



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the OSCE Head of Office in Baku Maurizio Pavesi

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 16, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to extend a warm welcome to Ambassador Pavesi and commend his continuing hard work in Azerbaijan.

The United States strongly applauds the affirmation that plans to work toward parliamentary elections in November that meet OSCE standards are at the heart of your Office's activities. The recently concluded visit to Azerbaijan by an ODIHR Needs-Assessment Mission was a very positive step in that direction. The United States hopes that the promise that the Speaker of the Azerbaijan parliament, Murtuz Alasgarov, made to the Mission that "democratic and transparent parliamentary polls will be held in Azerbaijan" will come true in five months.

To achieve that goal, Azerbaijan needs to revisit the 26 recommendations ODIHR made in its report following the October 2003 presidential elections. Many of these recommendations have, sadly, not yet been implemented almost two years after the fact.

We encourage continued cooperation between the OSCE Office in Baku and the Government of Azerbaijan in initiating legislative reform that is consistent with OSCE principles. Of particular merit is the Office's assistance in the drafting of a "Law on the Right to Obtain Information" by the Azerbaijan Parliament.

Within the economic and environmental dimension, the Office in Baku continues to encourage transparency in business practices. New anti-corruption laws will allow the country to liberalize its market and encourage further economic development. The United States firmly supports further actions by the Office in Baku and the Government of Azerbaijan to continue their joint fight against corruption, which is continues as a pervasive problem.

We encourage the Office in Baku to continue its program with the Constitutional Court to create effective rules of procedure. The Office's comparison of the Azerbaijani judicial system to those of the Southeastern European counterparts provides the country with a very fair and very obtainable standard.

As we have noted previously, we are concerned that the Azerbaijan government has failed to implement the OSCE Office's recommendations on judicial reform. We urge the government to review once again the report of the Office's Trial Monitoring Program and to apply its recommendations.

We applaud the Baku office's focus on the entrepreneurial training, particularly of women in the rural areas, which will help make women an active and a vital and important force within

Azerbaijan's economic system. In reference to upcoming elections, the Office continues to reinforce the importance of women in all parts of the process, including the nomination of candidates for positions.

The United States is concerned about the lack of concrete results in the area of freedom of the media and in trafficking in human beings. The Office in Baku has given positive assistance towards improving media freedom, but the government must improve legislation and, equally important, implementation practices in its relations with the mass media to ensure that there are no violations of these freedoms. We look forward to the report on Azerbaijan from the Special Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Additionally, the Azerbaijani Government has been slow to implement its National Action Plan on Trafficking, which was adopted in 2003 – also two years ago - with the assistance of the Office in Baku. However, as Ambassador Pavesi has reported, the draft “Law Against Trafficking in Human Beings” should be voted on during the next two weeks. We hope that, with the passage of this law, and the already appointed National Coordinator on Trafficking, that the Action Plan can now finally move forward.

We also welcome the mutual agreement of the nine-point framework for the conduct of political parties during the upcoming elections, as the Office in Baku elaborated with the support of the Government.

Most importantly, the staging of an opposition demonstration on June 5 that was free of violence and free of harassment displayed a new commitment to freedom of assembly by the authorities, and that was consistent with President Aliyev’s May 12th decree on election reform. We again urge the government to ensure that the decree is fully implemented in the future, as the arrests of opposition members on May 20 and 21 did not – as those arrests, in fact, contradicted that commitment.

Thank you, Ambassador Pavesi, for your report. We wish you continued success in Baku, particularly during this upcoming election period.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.